

Traditional Games mark Holidays in Arctic

Christmastime is a serene occasion in bush Alaska. The event permeates each village with joyous atmosphere and one can feel the uplifting peace that seems to settle in an aura in and around the tiny and larger settlements. There is a feeling of oneness — a feeling of companionship. Smiles and generous attitudes bloom under the undulating antics of northern lights and this same atmosphere pervades even if there was a blizzard or a biting high wind.

And so the Native folks in remote areas have taken into their warm selves the spirit of Christmas and found in doing it the purification of spirit in themselves and in their fellow villagers. There is joy in being alive. There is joy in shaking of hands. There is joy in making of new clothes by mothers intricately sewn and to be worn by their family members. There is love and good fellowship reborn among the bush folks that is accepted by each and everyone at Christmastime.

In some areas of the Arctic, the time of the birth of Christ was adopted with open arms and hearts because it coin-

cided fitfully with some of their own traditions. One of these was the return of the sun which the ancient Native folks observed joyously around this time of year. This occasion was the

household brings what it could spare of its most treasured traditional foods. There is more than enough for each man, woman and child. With keen appetites sated, the village takes a pause

their way to their modest homes. They are ready to face the coming year with renewed spirit and strength.

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time to feast — the time to perform ancient games a week at a time without pause. Shows of strength and skill surged in men of the village and contests became keen and serious. The winners were happy and the losers were a bit downcast but not too much. The spirit of keen competition prevailed.

Various contests begin after a soulfully serene church service commemorating the birth of Christ. The games begin on the evening of the auspicious and inspiring day. The showing of skills go on for one whole week until New Year's Day. Then the finale...a huge feat where each

until the evening of the New Year.

This evening is the occasion every villager had been looking forward to. The great finale of Native dancing begins. A great inspiring atmosphere fills a large room. The men begin their drumming and chanting. Motion dances are performed. Welcome dances are interspersed where everyone can take part, men, women, and children. Spirits are high. Joyous participating in showing of happiness prevails. There is applause and laughter. There is oneness of spirit.

And then the dance ends. The villagers had performed the commemoration of Christmas. They wind